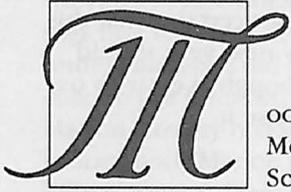


THE INTERNET
CO-PILOT
PROJECT

by Lynn Jurewicz



Mooresville Public Library (MPL) and Mooresville Consolidated High School collaborate on Internet Co-pilot, a project to introduce senior citizens to the Internet. MPL enlisted the high school Key Club members in early 1998 as co-hosts of on-ramp assistance sessions for seniors who were "new to the Net."

Library Director Lynn Jurewicz and Children's Librarian Sarah Wilson "pitched" the project at an early morning meeting of the high school Key Club, which immediately adopted it. Key Club members are on hand every Wednesday after school during the spring to give personal assistance and answer questions. As part of the program's first hour-long sessions Key Club advisor Don Adams presented a program describing how to get started surfing the Web. A Key Club member is paired with a senior for the one-on-one buddy sessions, which have been held alternately at the public library and the high school library. Seniors are typically asked what their hobbies or interests are, and the students use those interest terms to guide the seniors through a demonstration of browsers, search engines and, of course, the Inspire database.

Seniors' responses to the individualized assistance have ranged from, "It's not so hard after all!" and "I had no idea I could find that recipe on the Internet," to "Can I sign up for another session?" and "Can I bring my neighbor?" While the project was publicized in the local newspaper, on the radio and in the library newsletter, word-of-mouth has proved to be the greatest invitation of all. Most new participants who call the public library to register, have heard of the program's low-key approach from a past participant. Fliers and visits by library staff to the local senior center and Internet Co-pilot buttons worn by library staff round out the publicity strategies.

While all registration is done through the public library, the project is jointly governed by both the library director and the Key Club advisor. There has been plenty of unplanned planning and communication through the kids who are involved though: an added benefit has been increased voluntary use of the public library by the high school kids! These are kids whom we did not see before, and they are bringing their friends with them. Key Club participants are enthusiastic in their roles as instructors and have been relaxed and patient with the seniors.

Don Adams feels that as a Key Club service project, the program provides for a win-win situation. "Being able to co-op with the local public library has the added benefit of bringing the school and community into closer contact. Additionally, it seems to provide more exposure for the program." Along the way, both Mooresville's high school and middle school have opened their computer labs to the public in the weekday after-school hours on a continuing basis.

Internet Co-pilot is our success story for both the state technology grants and school-public library cooperation. The program started at the public library with a single dial-up Internet connection, funded by the first of the state technology grants. The new 56K connection has increased the viability of the project, and today the project utilizes both the state-funded 56K connection and a T1 connection at the high school. Thanks to the state funding, the partnership is now a larger one, involving the state, the public library and the local school corporation.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

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